

This action allows us to send a strong message abroad without ignoring the real needs of those here at home. After Congress phased out Federal farm supports, it became more essential for American farmers to sell their grains, meats, fruits, and vegetables to markets around the world. And today, products from one of every

three acres planted in America are sold abroad. Whenever we can, we should look for ways to expand our agricultural exports, not restrict them.

NOTE: S. 2282, approved July 14, was assigned Public Law No. 105-194.

Statement on the Report Entitled “America’s Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being”

July 15, 1998

Today my administration released an important report card on our Nation’s children, “America’s Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being.” Last year I called for this yearly report to provide the American people with a portrait of our children in critical areas such as health, education, and economic security.

In this second annual report, we find much to be grateful for—infant mortality is at an all-time low; the number of children with high blood lead levels, which can cause IQ or behavioral problems, has declined dramatically; more toddlers are up-to-date on their immunizations; more children are entering preschool, improving in math, and moving on to graduate from college; teen pregnancy has decreased; and a majority of parents are reporting that their children are in very good or excellent health. These strides reflect strategic investments in our Nation’s children, which have always been central

to my agenda to prepare America for the 21st century.

The report released today also demonstrates that we must now commit ourselves to making further progress for our children. Unfortunately, substance abuse and cigarette smoking among children are at unacceptable levels; reading scores are stagnant; and too many of our Nation’s children live in poverty.

We have demonstrated that we can work on a bipartisan basis to address the challenges our children face. That’s why, as I said yesterday, I am extremely disappointed that some in Congress have taken actions that threaten to undermine the important progress we have made by failing to provide critical investments for our young people. Our children deserve progress, not partisanship. As we pause to consider this report card on our children, I urge Members of Congress to work together to build a stronger future for our Nation’s children.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Financial Assistance for Farmers

July 15, 1998

Dear Mr. Leader:

I am very concerned about the financial stress facing farmers and ranchers in many regions of the country. Natural disasters, combined with a downturn in crop prices and farm income, expected by the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to remain weak for some time, cause me to question again the adequacy of the safety net provided by the 1996 farm bill. In some areas of the U.S., as many as five consecutive

years of weather and disease-related disasters have demonstrated weaknesses in the risk protection available through crop insurance.

During the debate on the 1996 farm bill, I encouraged Congress to maintain a sufficient farm safety net, and since its enactment my Administration has repeated that call, proposing measures to buttress the safety net that are consistent with the market-oriented policy of the

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1996 farm bill. The 1994 Crop Insurance Reform Act established a policy of improving the crop insurance program in order to remove the need for ad hoc disaster payments. This commitment to crop insurance as the preferred means of managing crop loss risks was reaffirmed in the 1996 farm bill. Farmers have responded to this policy by maintaining their enrollment in crop insurance at very high levels, especially in the Northern Plains states.

Therefore, I am instructing the Secretary of Agriculture to redouble his efforts to augment the current crop insurance program to more adequately meet farmers' needs to protect against farm income losses. In the interim, to respond to the current unusual situations, I urge the Congress to take emergency action to address specific stresses now afflicting sectors of the farm economy.

I agree with the intent of Senator Conrad's amendment and recommend that funding to address these problems be designated as emergency spending. A supplemental crop insurance program for farmers who experience repeated crop losses, a compensation program for farmers

and ranchers whose productive land continues to be under water, and extended authority for the livestock disaster program are examples of the type of emergency actions that could help farmers and ranchers.

It is also crucial that the Congress provide the level of funding proposed in my FY 1999 budget in the regular appropriations bills and that the Congress pass the full IMF package to support the efforts of American farmers.

I am confident that you and your colleagues share my concern for American farmers and ranchers who are experiencing financial stress from natural disasters and low prices, exacerbated by the global downturn in agricultural trade, and I encourage the Congress to take emergency action quickly.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Thomas A. Daschle, Senate minority leader, and Richard A. Gephardt, House minority leader. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.

Remarks at an Empowerment Zone Reception

July 15, 1998

Thank you so much. Welcome to the White House. Thank you for the good work you've been doing. I want to thank all the people who are responsible for this reception. I thank my Cabinet members and the Members of Congress for coming. I welcome all of you here, including the many, many elected officials, and especially Mayor Corradini. We wish her well as she assumes the helm of the U.S. Conference of Mayors. I'd like to thank the Marine Band for playing for you. They just celebrated their 200th birthday last weekend. As far as I know, there are no members of the original band still playing—[laughter]—but they have a magnificent sense of tradition.

I am so happy to have you here, to look out and see all of you, because you are the living embodiment of the political philosophy I have sought to bring alive in this country. You are the living embodiment of how I believe

Washington, DC, should work: putting progress and people over partisanship, community over division, tomorrow's hopes over yesterday's fears.

I cannot thank the Vice President enough for shepherding this community empowerment process these last several years from what was just a gleam in our eyes over one of our weekly lunches to this vast array of Americans. And if you look around this crowd, if this isn't one America for the 21st century, I don't know what is. I thank you.

I want you to take away from here, in addition to all the practical things you've learned and the sense of enthusiasm and positive outlook you have, a couple of very brief points. So I want to repeat briefly some of the things the Vice President said, because we still need your help.

You know, when we came here, we had a philosophy of Government that we thought was